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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002348

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCOR](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES RIBADU ISSUE WITH
FONMIN AND HOUSE SPEAKER

REF: A. ABUJA 2307

[1](#)B. FRAZER-SANDERS 11/30/08 TELCON

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Following a luncheon at the home of Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe on Sunday, November 30, the Ambassador had a private one-hour meeting with the FonMin to discuss the GON's total mishandling of issues surrounding former Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chair Nuhu Ribadu. She also covered recent missteps on press freedom in Nigeria, noting that an American blogger was still prevented from leaving Nigeria. During the formal luncheon, the Ambassador had the opportunity to sit next to Speaker of the House Dimeji Bankole and also raised the Ribadu issue with him. Both agreed that the GON's international image had been damaged by missteps on the Ribadu issue, and both confirmed that individuals within the Yar'Adua Administration (read Attorney General (AG) Michael Aondoakaa and Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mike Okiro) were using personal vendettas to take action against Ribadu. Neither the FonMin or Speaker were aware that Ribadu had not received his salary in recent months, which Ribadu told the Ambassador in a recent conversation. The FonMin said he was unaware and dismayed to hear this, and would raise the Ribadu pay issue with President Yar'Adua on December 1, with hopes of resolving it "as soon as possible." Bankole told the Ambassador that immediately after he returns from the Haj, he will sit down with both Ribadu and Waziri to "clean up this international mess." The Ambassador also raised the issue of press freedom with the FonMin in light of the recent crackdown on Channels TV, Leadership Newspaper, and private bloggers. He said old elements in the administration who see this as a national security issue do not know how to handle and finesse issues without doing what they know best- "locking people up." He also requested that the USG publicly acknowledge his efforts to move the GON into supporting the USG on several issues such as Mauritania, Zimbabwe, and the abstention vote on Iran. END SUMMARY.

FONMIN ON RIBADU

[1](#)2. (C) In a private one-hour meeting on November 30, the Ambassador expressed to the FonMin the USG's concerns about the treatment of former EFCC Chair Nuhu Ribadu. He agreed that the treatment of Ribadu is harming Nigeria's

international image, but was surprised by how significantly this issue had affected the relationship between the USG and the GON. He said it was not the GON's policy to harm or demean Ribadu, but rather "hawks" in the government who were using personal vendettas to "do their own thing" against him (implying AG Aondoakaa and IGP Mike Okiro). He said President Yar'Adua was very embarrassed for having to intervene to ensure that Ribadu received his certificate of graduation from the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) (Ref A). However, he also stated that Ribadu did not help his own case by failing to use the official process to file a grievance against the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). The Ambassador asked how he should be expected to rely on the police and official channels when he had not been paid in four months. "You cannot expect him to still consider himself a civil servant of the GON when he does not get paid, or is treated in this manner," the Ambassador said. The FonMin was very surprised and dismayed to hear that Ribadu had not received his salary and promised to inform the President in their December 1 meeting to resolve this issue as soon as possible.

13. (C) For the FonMin's upcoming visit to the U.S., the Ambassador stressed that the Ribadu issue would be front and center in his meetings, but that he should also prepare to discuss problems with press freedom here, the President's health, the delay in naming cabinet ministers, and the anticipated Supreme Court decision on the 2007 Election. She said the GON will need a rational plan for handling Ribadu as he is an international figure very connected with Nigeria's fight in the war against corruption. She said the GON was

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"shooting itself in the foot," and should be bigger than the issue by responding more responsibly as a democratic government to things it does not like. The FonMin said that "old thinkers" in the State Security Service (SSS) and NPF think they can behave any way they want. Maduekwe claimed (similar to Special Advisor Yakubu- see septel) that President Yar'Adua is being careful because if he comes down too hard on the SSS they may, "go into hunker down mode and refuse to do anything at all, or set him up by not telling him something they should." He expressed worry that the Ribadu issue was becoming the single biggest problem between the GON and the USG, and said it was unfortunate as he sees himself as the voice of reason in the cabinet on Ribadu and other issues such as freedom of the press. However, he opined that "hawks" (implying that the AG was the rouge element in the government) had no appreciation for global implications on GON actions, which created a larger problem for him as Foreign Minister. He said the actions against Ribadu thus far were "not only stupid," but also damaging to Nigeria's image at a time when he wants it to be a strategic partner of the United States.

14. (C) The FonMin continued that there was a real divide in the GON cabinet with the hawks being dominant, but failing to see the global environment as regards to foreign and domestic networks. Maduekwe noted that he always tried to be the voice of reason, but also had to balance that with trying to encourage the hawks over to his side. (Comment: At the Ambassador's last home-meeting with the FonMin on November 18 for Exxon Mobil, it was the first time she had seen both the AG and Presidential Special Advisor Yakubu at the Maduekwe home. What was most interesting was the AG-Yakubu buddy-buddy relationship, as well as the efforts by the FonMin to begin to try to co-opt them on foreign policy issues. Maduekwe ensured that the Ambassador sat next to Yakubu and also had a short dialogue with the AG. By far they are the hawks in the GON. End Comment). In addition, on the GON hawk-dove divide, the FonMin gave the Ambassador an additional example. He said on the recent UN vote on Iran, someone else in the GON had sent an official request to the GON permrep to vote against the U.S. position. Maduekwe told the permrep to disregard this request and instructed her to abstention. He concluded that this is the type of stuff that

happens in the cabinet all the time between the hawks and the moderates.

FONMIN ON PRESS FREEDOM

15. (C) In their meeting, the Ambassador also expressed concerns to the FonMin about the recent missteps on freedom of the press and freedom of speech in Nigeria, pointing to GON actions of late including shutting down Channels TV, picking up the editor and publisher of Leadership Newspaper, and detaining bloggers like Johnathan Elendu and Amcit Emmanuel Asiwe, whose passport has been in SSS possession for more than a month, prohibiting him from leaving Nigeria. She said the GON needs to be stronger and act like a government when it comes to these issues because by taking issues such as this personally and behaving as it has in recent months, the GON is failing to act like a true democracy. The FonMin responded that some old elements in the government see every issue as a matter of national security and that they were responsible for such actions. He said he would raise the press freedom issue with the President, and expressed concern that because his country lacks sophistication in senior levels of government, senior officials do not know how to handle and finesse issues and resort to what they know best--locking people up. He said he was not aware about Asiwe being barred from departing Nigeria and would raise the issue with the President immediately so that the passport would be returned and the Amcit could be home in time to spend Christmas with his family.

FONMIN ASKS FOR USG SUPPORT

16. (C) The Ambassador raised the points from A/S Frazer on
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getting the proper and equitable distribution on Zimbabwean ministerial posts (Ref B). The FonMin said he would push on this issue, as well as on Mauritania and the DRC, at the next AU Peace and Security Meeting in Addis Ababa in mid-December. Maduekwe also asked the Ambassador for public recognition of Nigeria's support on Zimbabwe and Mauritania, and said he would make sure someone sees the Mauritania Delegation visiting this week. He also claimed that there were very few "polished, cosmopolitan internationalists" in the Yar'Adua Administration, and as the sole voice on Iran he had worked very hard to get an abstention in the last UN vote. He told the Ambassador that he wants some successes with the USG, and does not want to be lumped into the viewpoint of supporting the position of the "hawks" in the administration if they prevail since he sees Nigeria as a multi-lateral partner of the U.S. on peace and security.

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE ON RIBADU

17. (C) Earlier, at the formal luncheon, the Ambassador had the opportunity to sit next to Speaker of the House Dimeji Bankole and challenged him on the Ribadu issue. Bankole agreed that Nigeria's international image was being damaged by missteps on this issue and said he would call on Ribadu and EFCC Chair Farida Waziri when he returns from the Haj to inform them that the larger international image is at stake. He said he did not understand what Waziri was doing, insisting that both the current and former EFCC chairs need to first take the interest of the country at heart. Like the FonMin, Bankole expressed concern about Ribadu's failure to use official grievance channels, to which the Ambassador suggested he may not have felt supported since he hadn't received a salary in four months. The Speaker said demoting him was "a silly thing to do" and the EFCC and "whoever is going after Ribadu" (read: the AG) did not serve Nigeria's best interest. He added that even if Ribadu is guilty of taking money himself, which many are claiming, the broader national interest needs to be front and center and prevail.

18. (C) COMMENT: The Ambassador will continue to try to be in touch with Ribadu to ensure that he is safe and instituting a plan to find ways out of Nigeria. She told the FonMin that the USG had renewed his U.S. visa and would be very disappointed if he were blocked from taking international offers to visit the U.S. Both the FonMin and Speaker of the House were of the same view that any action against Ribadu would be a disservice to Nigeria. Both said there was no implicit policy to harm Ribadu, but agreed that personal vendettas within the Administration were doing their own thing- namely the AG and IGP. Perhaps the President's embarrassment in having to intervene to get Ribadu his NIPSS certificate coupled with the fact that the Ambassador told the FonMin he is likely to be "hammered" in Washington on this issue, will move the GON into preventing the hawks in the administration from taking out their personal vendettas on Ribadu by harming him further. Perhaps not. END COMMENT. Sanders